

NBC TODAY SHOW
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[NICARAGUA]/[GUMBEL: On Close Up this morning, we look to the threat
[INMAN]of sophisticated fighter air craft in Nicaragua. It was
reported yesterday that a Soviet cargo ship, suspected by
U.S. officials of carrying MiG fighter planes, had docked
in the Nicaraguan port of Corinto. For an analysis of the
situation, we are joined this morning by former Deputy
Director of the CIA Adm. Bobby Inman, who's in our NBC
affiliate WTVV in Austin, Texas, this morning and good
morning, Admiral. BOBBY INMAN (former deputy director,
CIA): Good morning, Mr. Gumbel.

GUMBEL: Based on the evidence you've seen, do you believe
there are MiGs in Nicaragua? INMAN: Really can't tell
whether they're there yet or not, Mr. Gumbel. We know that
they'd begun making plans to receive them almost three
years ago when they sent pilots off to Bulgaria to be
trained, but usually where the MiGs, they can be shipped
in crates below deck and we really won't know that they're
there until we seem them unloaded.

GUMBEL: Just how seriously would the presence of Soviet
MiGs upset the balance in Central America? INMAN: It
totally changes the balance. The threat clearly would
extend to Costa Rica, to Honduras as well as El Salvador.
There is no defensive reason that Nicaragua needs to move
to high-powered jet aircraft. Only if they've got
offensive intentions to help support, export a revolution
in the hemisphere.

GUMBEL: You heard the news this morning. The possibility
now exists that those crates contained Czech-built L39ZA
type aircraft. Now, that's just numbers to me. How do
those type of aircrafts compare to MiGs? INMAN: I've not
seen crates that carry those helicopters, Mr. Gumbel, so I
really can't give you a flat, outright answer. Crateology
is a, is a science. It's not an exact science. We know
generally the size of crates that are used. We watched
them over the years and you remember that, well, it goes
back all the way to the Cuban missile crisis. The
handling...

GUMBEL: Well, you... INMAN: The handling of this
shipment out of a port from which they ship all kinds of
arms is not unusual. What is unusual is the route taken,
all the way around Cape Horn and up to the Pacific coast.
The appearance of wanting to slip something in quietly and
I think that's what really raised the suspicion that it
was going to turn out to be the introduction of the MiGs,

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rather than simply helicopters.

GUMBEL: We've been looking at, at, at the crates. You tell us. Physically, how much of a MiGs fuselage could even fit in those crates? INMAN: Actually, there are different crates for different size of aircraft, but the entire fuselage, not yet assembled, of course, obviously the wings have to be separate and the tail sections, but they can contain the basic frame of the MiG-21.

GUMBEL: If the MiGs are in Nicaragua, when might we know for certain? I mean, how long can, can the Sandinistas even hope to keep their presence a secret? INMAN: In other places, in Cuba at earlier times, they were able to keep secret the arrival until they began the assembly process itself. Once they begin the assembly and want to roll them out to be tested, at that point they will become detectable.

GUMBEL: This is a, this is a very touchy question, but the administration is saying the MiGs will be removed if they are in fact there. You're a military man. Within reason, how could they be removed? What are the options? INMAN: The primary option is clearly air strike, whether by land-based air, or carrier-based air. Back in '82 when we knew they were already raiding air fields and that the pilots were finishing their primary training in Bulgaria, the Soviets were told clearly that introduction of MiG aircraft into Nicaragua was an escalation that would not be acceptable and for two years we've seen no sign of it. I'm out of any direct touch, so I don't know what prompts this to come up now and I, you know, I don't even rule out the possibility that the Soviets were sort of testing us with this process just to see if we really meant we would react and that they never had the intention to ship MiGs at this point in time, but they clearly have known since early '82 that the U.S. would consider it a very major escalation.

GUMBEL: One final note. There are also, as you noted, reports of sophisticated attack helicopters being, being delivered. To some Pentagon officials, those helicopters are more threatening to Nicaragua's neighbors than the MiGs. Do you agree? INMAN: The helicopters clearly would have a potential significant impact on Nicaragua's fight with the contras, but I do not see them as a significant threat to Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador. The aircraft in the Honduran air force could deal with the threat of the helicopters. They could not deal with the MiG-21s.

GUMBEL: Adm. Bobby Inman, thank you very much for your insights. Have a good weekend, sir. INMAN: Thank you, sir.